

# *Late Projection*

RICK BENJAMIN

My twin turns toward the camera  
he's propped into the elbow  
of a blossoming pear, sets the timer,  
puts his arm around my mother's  
one good shoulder & smiles  
in a way someone smiles just after  
he's spread ashes of the dead  
around the base of an almond tree  
planted just minutes before.  
In the picture my mother looks  
bewildered. Yes, it is true my father  
loved almonds, but he also loved  
pop-corn; shouldn't there be stalks  
several feet above their heads in some  
familiar place? She cannot remember  
five minutes ago, but remembers every detail  
of people going down in that plane  
in the cornfield in Iowa. How they walked  
in a maze with only the blue sky above  
them wondering if they'd arrived  
in heaven. Of course she also remembers  
her husband's dead, that these ashes,  
as my brother has already said, will feed

the roots of a new tree. In one of our last  
conversations my Dad declared that,  
  
though he didn't believe in reincarnation,  
he'd just as soon come back a dog, & I said,  
  
*well, maybe in some places*, & he was so soft  
near the end he laughed, which he rarely did  
  
with me, & it was as if he had passed me the bowl  
of popcorn or the urn of ashes he was about  
  
to turn into. In the three weeks it takes  
to get a death certificate in the county  
  
of Los Angeles on account of the down-  
sizing, a body lies in state, freeze-dried,  
  
without a license to burn. Later,  
  
a plastic container that is surprisingly  
heavy arrives one day in the hands  
  
of the nice woman from UPS &, if you have early  
Alzheimer's disease, a hole's been burned  
  
into your memory where your husband used to be.  
You'll put him on the counter until someone else  
  
arrives to tell you what to do with him. Same as  
before, really, except that he would have been the one  
  
telling her, next to the tree, saying when it was  
she was supposed to smile.